

Call for Working Group Discussants

2012 OAH/NCPH Annual Meeting; Milwaukee, Wisconsin
April 18-22, 2012

Working groups, led by senior practitioners and involving up to twelve discussants, allow conferees to explore in depth a subject of shared concern before and during the annual meeting. In these innovative seminar-like conversations, participants have a chance to discuss questions raised by specific programs, problems, or initiatives in their own history or public history practice with peers grappling with similar issues. For 2012, eleven working groups are being assembled:

- 1. A Fresh Look at Measures of Success in Public History Work**
- 2. Biography and Museums**
- 3. Civil War Sesquicentennial**
- 4. Graphs, Maps, and Trees: Imagining the Future of Public Interfaces to Cultural Heritage Collections**
- 5. How Much Is a Piece of the "True Road" Worth? Evaluating Historic Roadway and Preservation Values**
- 6. Imagined Places, Actual Spaces: Physical Manifestations of Romanticized Pasts**
- 7. Imagining New Careers in History**
- 8. Public History and Sustainability**
- 9. Public History Online: Using the Web to Collaborate and Share**
- 10. Reconstructing the New Deal: Towards a National Inventory of New Deal Art and Public Works**
- 11. What It's Worth: Valuing and Pricing the Work of Historical Consultants**

To join a working group, please submit a one-paragraph email message describing the issues you wish to raise with your peers, together with a one-page resume, c.v., or biographical statement by October 6. We welcome submissions from individuals across a range of professions and career stages. Please see the specific working group descriptions below. Individuals who are selected will be listed as working group discussants in the conference *Program* and will participate in the working group session at the annual meeting.

This winter the group facilitators will ask participants to contribute a case statement of no more than two to four double spaced pages for discussion. The case statement will describe a participant's particular experience, such as a case study, define the issues it raises, and suggests strategies and/or goals for resolution. Case statements will be circulated among participants by email and posted in PDF format on the NCPH website. Discussants are expected to read and comment by email briefly on one another's case statements before the conference date. Some working groups may also have additional shared background reading materials identified by their facilitators. The culmination of the working group is the working group's session in Milwaukee.

To apply, please send your paragraph and one-page resume/c.v./biographical statement by **October 6** to ncph@iupui.edu with the specific working group title in the subject line of your email. (You may apply to participate in a working group whether or not you have submitted another presentation or session proposal. You may apply for only one working group.) All presenters, attendees, and other participants are expected to register for the annual meeting.

More information about working groups is available at <http://ncph.org/cms/conferences/working-groups/>.

1. A Fresh Look at Measures of Success in Public History Work

Facilitators:

Alex Bethke, Naval Facilities Engineering Command; abethke@gmail.com
Dwight Pitcaithley, New Mexico State University; dwightpitcaithley@comcast.net
David Rotenstein, *Historian for Hire*; david.rotenstein@earthlink.net
Darlene Roth, Consulting Historian; darlene@darleneroth.com
Jannelle Warren-Findley, Arizona State University; atjwf@asu.edu

When the public history movement was founded, more than thirty years ago, little thought was given to how public history work would be judged, except to encourage the standards of scholarship that underlie the entire profession. It was enough, during that generation, to get the work going. Now we have more than a generation of public history practice, degree programs, and decades of experience in heritage tourism, cultural resource management, historic preservation, archives, museums, and public interpretation in historic sites and environments. Historical scholarship is always an element of the work, but not always the dominant element. A recent NCPH white paper, *Tenure, Promotion and the Publicly Engaged Academic Historian* illustrates again what has been an on-going problem: how is work to be properly evaluated that does not occur within academic purview? There is a missing element in these discussions that could be addressed directly that might add substance to future deliberations concerning the work of public historians and academic historians engaged in public history. Simply put it's this: just what constitutes success in public history? It is time to develop a new success model for public historians based on service and scholarship, with marks and measures that can be readily discerned by history professionals anywhere. We need guidelines to evaluate work where scholarship may be the beginning rather than the end of a project and where publication may be a by-product or only one of many products of a large, inter-disciplinary undertaking. This proposed session intends to tackle the set of issues head on and to create a set of criteria upon which a new success model might be based. The five participants in this session propose a working session. Together, we have more than one hundred years of work in public history. The panel includes one pioneering public history (and a founder of NCPH), two veteran historians with both academic and public history service, and two younger professionals who are already breaking new ground in their work. The facilitators will devise a set of questions that all participants will answer. We will undertake a period of discovery, share our findings, report to the audience what we have determined, hold an open discussion, and hopefully, we will project our findings for more discussion and dissemination. We hope this activity will provide a fruitful beginning point for this new success model. It is our intention to be of service to the profession of history, not to dictate its choices, but to contribute to the understanding of how the profession moves through the public marketplace, where it leaves its marks, and how we might acknowledge what those marks are as contributions to the field in general.

2. Biography and Museums

Facilitators:

Peter Liebhold, National Museum of American History; liebholdp@si.edu
Nancy Davis, National Museum of American History; davisne@si.edu

How can museums use biography in more effective and compelling ways? History museums have employed biography as an interpretive strategy for decades. But how can we improve and even rethink these approaches using new media, new approaches to objects, and even performance? What can historians and curators learn from each other to push the methodological, technological and interpretive boundaries of biography?

This working group is being convened by curators from the National Museum of American History to start a conversation about how we create and deploy biography in the 21st century museum. It will be the first of series of conversations on the topic and part of a larger initiative at the Smithsonian Institution to examine innovative approaches to biography. The group seeks ten to fifteen participants who may have projects in process or recently completed.

3. Civil War Sesquicentennial

Facilitators:

Bob Beatty, American Association for State and Local History; beatty@aaslh.org

W. Eric Emerson, South Carolina Department of Archives and History;

eemerson@scdah.state.sc.us

Dwight Pitcaithley, New Mexico State University; dwightpitcaithley@comcast.net

The years from now until 2015—the Civil War Sesquicentennial—present a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a broadly focused national effort to educate Americans as well as foreign visitors about one of this nation’s most traumatic and transformative events. With thoughtful preparation, America’s community of academic and public historians can provide an inclusive set of educational activities at museums and historical societies, historic sites, libraries, colleges and universities, in our nation’s classrooms, in print, and on television, radio, and the Internet. Against this backdrop, the American Association for State and Local History worked closely with public historians and practitioners to develop a list of four recommendations for the Sesquicentennial and identify implementation strategies and best practices:

1. Activities should emphasize 150 years of history, and not solely the 150th anniversary of hostilities.
2. Local museums and historical organizations should make themselves available as centers for open discourse about the war and its legacy.
3. The field should make stronger efforts to provide evidence about the causes and effects of the Civil War by sharing primary sources with the public.
4. It is important to respect, hear, and engage all groups.

In addition, AASLH has actively worked to engage key stakeholders at the national level and regularly convened state sesquicentennial commissions to ensure a robust commemoration that is both historically and intellectually honest and one that does not repeat the mistakes of the War’s centennial celebration.

This working group will explore how public historians and history organizations have commemorated (or plan to commemorate) the Civil War Sesquicentennial in light of these principles and recommend a process for archiving the nation’s and historical community’s commemoration of CW150.

4. Graphs, Maps, and Trees: Imagining the Future of Public Interfaces to Cultural Heritage Collections

Facilitators:

Trevor Owens, Library of Congress, trow@loc.gov

Steve Lubar, John Nicholas Brown Center for Public Humanities and Cultural Heritage,

lubar@brown.edu

Sharon Leon, Center for History and New Media, sleon@gmu.edu

Digital cultural heritage collections include temporal, locative, and categorical information which is increasingly being tapped to build dynamic interfaces to these materials. These kinds of dynamic interfaces are increasingly what end users expect of their interactions with online content. There are now several software platforms, including SIMILE's Exhibit, the Center for History and New Media's Omeka, OCLC's Content DM, as well as a range of commercial museum, library, and archive systems.

These kinds of tools are generating an unprecedented opportunity for historians, librarians, archivists, curators and the general public to create interactive and dynamic web experiences with digital cultural heritage collections.

Participants in this working group will discuss current projects in this space and also work to imagine the future of these kinds of interfaces.

The call for participation should be broadly interpreted but the following kinds of proposals are specifically encouraged,

- Discussions of the possibilities of visualization platforms for cultural heritage collections
- Worked examples of implementations of interfaces to digital cultural heritage collections
- Proposed models for new interfaces based on work in other fields
- Reports on software currently being developed to meet these needs
- Critical analysis of specific implementations of online interfaces to digital collections
- Ruminations on how these kinds of interfaces change and alter the process of historical storytelling
- Analyses by users of cultural heritage data of their interactions with existing interfaces

5. How Much Is a Piece of the "True Road" Worth? Evaluating Historic Roadway and Preservation Values

Facilitators:

Hugh Davidson, Maricopa Co. (AZ) Department of Transportation; samhughroe@mac.com
Christina Slattery, Historic Preservation Lead, Mead & Hunt, christina.slattery@meadhunt.com
Jim W. Steely, SWCA Environmental; steely@swca.com

In his classic exposition on material culture history Brooke Hindle deployed the storied 'True Cross' as an antiquary relic to considerable advantage. Time revealed that such medieval relics lacked authenticity, but purported crucifixion fragments captured people's imagination as embodying cultural significance for considerable time. In this working group forum we ponder whether cultural resource specialist's and preservationist's attempts to grapple with remnant modern roadway—running the gamut from old postal roads up to Interstate highways—doesn't invest inordinate meaning to older transportation facilities. Recent analysis of highway history in the West and Midwest will inform our discussion, but we seek out other participants from across the country. From macadamized roads, to two-lane blacktop, and up to expansive parkways and divided freeways, we assign significance to roadway sites arguing they embody once notable achievement and cultural attributes worthy of preservation. Across the nation public historians, cultural resource managers and preservationist's repeatedly attach significance to these structures; however, how often are we yielding to a nostalgic impulse toward automobile culture, which undoubtedly merits consideration as popular culture, but rarely translates into well interpreted appreciation of American automobility? Should our desire to recognize twentieth

century automobility receive its own catalog of worthy historical artifacts? Undoubtedly. The focus of this working group is to discuss boundaries; namely, just how far should we cast our net to include authentic remnant roadway structures. Just how much is the true road worth in terms of promoting preservation values and public interpretation?

6. Imagined Places, Actual Spaces: Physical Manifestations of Romanticized Pasts

Facilitators:

Sarah McCormick, University of California, Riverside; smcco001@ucr.edu

Emily McEwen, University of California, Riverside; emcew001@ucr.edu

Chelsea Vaughn, University of California, Riverside; cvaug002@ucr.edu

This working group will explore romanticized understandings of local history as they appear in such public historic stand-bys as architectural recreations, public commemorations, monuments, festivals, and performances. From costumed celebrations and theatrical living history demonstrations to artifact collecting, museum exhibitions, and interpretation at tourist hot spots, the tangible manifestations of historical pageantry and performance are central to the field of public history. Through this working group we hope to explore new ways to examine the impact of these romanticized understandings on local historical sites, focusing specifically on the power of performance in constructing ethnicity, gender, regional, and national identity, the transformative effects of costuming and the creation of “otherness,” the notion of collecting and display as performance, and the overall driving force of consumerism at many historic sites. While the work of the panel organizers centers upon the Western United States, and Southern California in particular, we welcome and encourage submissions from other regions in order to expand the discussion. We want to think broadly about the historical and contemporary effects of the romanticization of history, its continued (and shifting) hold on the public’s imagination, and think about how scholarship on these topics might be reconsidered in the future.

7. Imagining New Careers in History

Facilitators:

Seth Bruggeman, Temple University; sbrug@temple.edu

William Walker, State University of New York-Oneonta; walkerws@oneonta.edu

This working group will bring together students, history faculty, and innovative historical entrepreneurs for a brainstorming session to imagine new careers in history. Mindful of the conference theme—“frontiers of capitalism and democracy”—working group participants will embrace a spirit of entrepreneurship and exploration as they engage in conversation about the future of the historical profession. Seeing the large pool of talented young individuals with training in history as an opportunity rather than a crisis, this working group is a chance for creative thinkers to develop new ideas and incubate developing ones. It is also a place for successful historical entrepreneurs to share their secrets. Building on discussions at previous NCPH conferences that have connected academic historians with museum professionals, consultants, and historians in for-profit industries, this working group will offer a productive environment for sharing off-the-wall ideas that just might transform how history is practiced both inside and outside the academy. The working group’s organizers will solicit case statements from participants that analyze existing historical ventures—both non-profit and for-profit—and suggest new possibilities. The emphasis will be on creativity and innovation. Participants in the working group, especially students, will be encouraged to build collaborations with one another that continue beyond the conference meeting.

8. Public History and Sustainability

Facilitator:

Alex Bethke, Naval Facilities Engineering Command; abethke@gmail.com
Priya Chhaya, National Trust for Historic Preservation; priya_chhaya@nthp.org
Leah Glaser, Central Connecticut State University; glaserles@ccsu.edu

Sustainability is arguably one of today's "Frontiers of Capitalism and Democracy," offering new areas of entrepreneurship and job creation while asking for democratic investment in our lives and planet. How should public historians address this trend? This working group will continue and expand a conversation from the 2010 NCPH/ASEH conference in Portland entitled, "Recycling Buildings? Reframing Historic Preservation in the Language of Sustainability." A follow-up panel was organized at the 2011 ASEH conference in Phoenix, entitled "Public History and Sustainability," where the theme also focused on "Sustainability." THIS working group will open with some of the issues discussed at the ASEH conference, how ASEH is pursuing its role in the sustainability movement, as well as ideas about how NCPH can partner with groups like ASEH and/or OAH on this issue and bring our own voices to the table. We hope that this working groups can come to some consensus on how we as historians define sustainability. Participants will share ways a historical sensibility, methods, research, and projects can support sustainability, balance sustainability with historical interpretation and preservation, encourage responsible growth planning strategies, educate on climate change, and train a workforce for a newer "green economy." This working group seeks participants from the ASEH/NCPH 2010 preservation-focused group to build upon our discussion. We'll also seek case statements that expand the definition of sustainability beyond preservation to examine historical topics, public history projects, interpretative programs, tourist attractions, activities and/or strategies that have or can influence local and national economic and environmental conversations and policy. How do historians and especially public historians define sustainability and our role on this "frontier" to influence public philosophy and policy? How do historians and preservationists become key partners for planners and policy makers? How do we change or training of future preservationists and recruit new preservation disciples?

9. Public History Online: Using the Web to Collaborate and Share

Facilitators:

Jordan Grant, American University; jg7138a@student.american.edu
Will Tchakirides, American University; wtchak@gmail.com

With the help of the web, our cultural institutions have grown adept at "getting the word out." Institutional and exhibition websites, blogs, and social media campaigns have given the public new ways to access our collections and expertise. Despite these welcome changes, in too many instances, old hierarchies and one-way information streams have endured. Even with "Web 2.0" innovations, true dialogue and collaboration has proven elusive. This working group will discuss how we can build more democratic and sustainable cultural institutions using digital technology and the web.

- How do we create spaces where visitors can freely share their knowledge, their objects, and their opinions?
- How do we create opportunities for the public to work collaboratively with traditional experts?
- If we can create these spaces and opportunities, how do we convince the public to invest their time and energy with us, and not someone else?

As the questions above suggest, this working group welcomes a wide range of participants and projects. Participants should prepare case studies that describe attempts to foster real sharing and collaboration in a digital environment. We hope group members will be candid about both their successes and their failures. Case studies should consider both the technical and the institutional challenges that these digital projects present. We hope this session will be an opportunity for learning and discussion, and that it will spark larger conversations about how we can pursue public history in more meaningful ways online.

10. Reconstructing the New Deal: Towards a National Inventory of New Deal Art and Public Works

Facilitators:

Eileen Eagan, University of Southern Maine; eagan@usm.maine.edu

Gray Brechin, University of California at Berkeley; gbrechin@berkeley.edu

Sean Lent, Independent Scholar; sean.lent@maine.edu

This working group centers on interdisciplinary efforts to locate, collect, and bring to light the federally sponsored art and public works of the New Deal. We also plan to relate discussion of New Deal projects to recent controversies such as that over the labor history mural in Maine. This is public history in terms of locating and interpreting public sources and also doing so in relation to public policy. It also represents cultural democracy on the edge of capitalism, and its crash. This revival and renewal of New Deal history seems especially essential in light of recent debates over the impact of New Deal policy and efforts to forget or distort the legacy of those policies. A group at the University of California at Berkeley has developed the California Living New Deal project to map New Deal projects in California. Groups elsewhere, including Maine, have engaged students in similar projects in those areas. A new project could expand these efforts into a national inventory. This working group will bring together faculty and students involved in these efforts. We invite others from around the country to join us in this discussion and planning to pursue this project. Eileen Eagan and Sean Lent will discuss and present results from the activity in Maine. Gray Brechin, from the Geography department at UC Berkeley will discuss his experiences and plans based on the California project. He will also assert the urgent need for a national inventory of New Deal public works. Discussion by the people attending the working group will follow short presentations by Brechin, Eagan and Lent. This working group will take place at the Milwaukee Public Museum, a short two block walk from the Frontier Airlines Center.

11. What It's Worth: Valuing and Pricing the Work of Historical Consultants

Facilitators:

Emily Greenwald, Historical Research Associates, Inc.; egreenwald@hrassoc.com

Kathy Shinnick, Consulting Historian; kathrynleann@gmail.com

What is the value of history? History consultants often notice that pricing and selling our services can be challenging and sometimes uncomfortable. In graduate school, we learned how to dig in the archives and write great narratives, not to market ourselves and make a profit.

This working group will assess the value of history on two levels. First, how can history consultants appropriately price services? Topics could include assessing the markets we work in, finding peer pricing data, determining a client's price point, and weighing fixed price contracts against time and materials projects. Second, how do we persuade potential clients that our

services have value, that history is relevant to their endeavors? In short, how do we sell history? This discussion could include marketing strategies, ideas about where to network, and how to craft an “elevator speech.”